

# LODI HISTORIAN



▲ 1937. Mrs. Joseph Gardner, who as Miss Laura Ortez was in the court of the 1934 Festival.

## EARLY GRAPES IN LODI

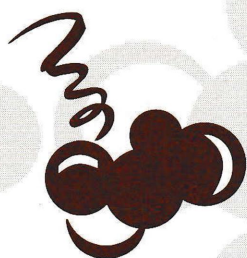
*By Lucy Reller and Ralph Lea*

The missions in California had grape vines and made wine for their own use.

In 1850, at the start of California as a state, the pioneers brought grape vines from Europe with their belongings. One of the first was Captain Weber planting vines at his home on the waterfront in Stockton.

A year later, George and William B. West imported forty different grape varieties from Boston and planted them at El Pinal, north of Stockton.

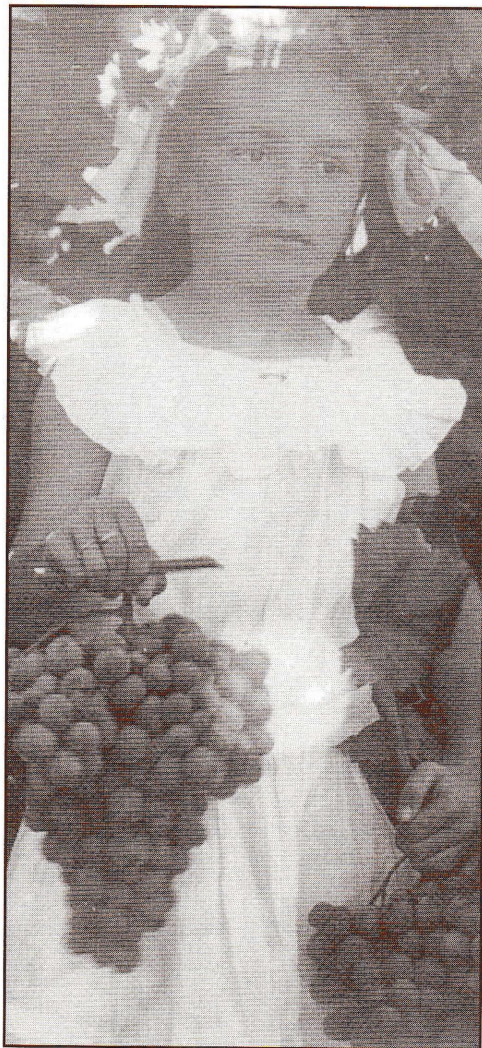
The Tokay (Flame) grape is a native of Kabylia, a province in the mountains of Algeria. The first Tokay vineyard in California and probably the United States, was planted in 1857 southeast of Sacramento in the Florin District by James Rutter. Later Tokays were planted near Folsom on the American River, Vacaville and the Fresno area. The lack of cool dewy nights prevented the grapes from turning red.



1907 Tokay Carnival-prize winner Tokay exhibit by E.W. Leffler.







▲ 1907 Grape Carnival; Ralphine Freeman Tindel.

In 1861 George Perley and George West planted 30 varieties of grapes on their farm a few miles west of Woodbridge. The John Thompson family, father of Wilson Henry would buy

this vineyard 18 years later, and plant 30 acres of Tokay grapes.

In 1864 George J. Leffler planted six acres of Tokays, two acres of Black Prince and two acres containing fifteen other varieties. Leffler's vineyard was located on the Black Lands south of Live Oak School near Eight Mile Road. The Tokays and Black Prince did well and Leffler marketed his grapes in San Francisco having them transported by boat.

From early on the county grape growers planted Madeline, Black Hamburg, Sweet Water, Black Ferrar and Emperor. These grapes prospered and did well. The Muscat and other raisin varieties did not do well and became unsuitable.

One of the oldest vineyards in Lodi was the Mission grapes on the A.T. Ayers ranch just north of Lodi on the south side of the Mokelumne River. Much later, in 1880 this vineyard was purchased by Stephen Sanguinetti and cared for by son Louis and grandson Allen.

Ezekiel Lawrence, early Lodi pioneer planted grapes and fruit trees on his ranch just northeast of future Lodi. When Lawrence arrived in 1857, there was less than 10 acres of grapes in San Joaquin County.

In 1879 the first shipment of Lodi grapes, Black Prince, large sweet berries were sent by a railroad cattle car to New York City in 16 days travel and arrived in fine condition. Probably the

car was made up from a number of vineyards.

In 1884 Tindale and Mundell were shipping Lodi watermelons and Albert J. Woods owned the Lodi Fruit Drying and Packing Company. However, what kind of fruit he packed is unknown.

The Lodi Sentinel of October 16, 1886 reports that David Kettleman shipped the first grapes of the season.

Two years later Allen T. Covell purchased 160 acres north of Turner Road and west of Lower Sacramento Road for \$125.00 per acre. He started planting grapes and in 1890 set out a large block of Tokay grapes, the first commercial planting. The cutting came from the French and Buell Vineyard in Florin.

Many families in the Lodi area believed that their forefathers were one of the first to plant Tokay grapes. They are probably correct as many farmers planted Tokays about the same time. Some of these can be documented.

Everts F. Mills was born March 29, 1889 and his parents celebrated the birth by planting a small Tokay vineyard south of their home on Lower Sacramento Road.

Elliott E. Morse planted Tokay grapes in 1892 and John Boyce's Tokay vineyard dates from 1894. B.F. Langford, Victor Jahant and Henry Pope were some of the early Tokay grape growers.



▲ The nine grape shippers in Lodi, 1907: Anderson, Buck, California Exchange, Earl, Mason, Pioneer, Producers, Ralls and Valley donated Tokay grapes to help pay the cost of Tokay Carnival.



James A. Anderson was born in Missouri. In 1874 he came to Sacramento and worked in a nursery. Nine years later he started his own nursery in Clements. In 1887 Anderson moved to Lodi and became manager of the Riverside Nursery and Fruit Farm located one-quarter mile east of Cherokee Lane on the George Lawrence property.

August 11, 1894 James A. Anderson and Charles A. Rich, Lodi merchant and farmer joined together to ship their fresh fruit. In order to do so economically they asked other fruit growers to join with them and make up a full railroad carload and obtain a lower freight rate. Rich and Anderson received a few cents a box for loading. That would make them the first shippers of Lodi fruit.

That same year the Earl Fruit Co., one of the pioneer fruit companies in California, started in the grape business in Lodi. Like the fruit companies to come they had a headquarters and many locations. It is not known for sure to what extent Earl provided service to growers, such as crates, packing area and freight for the next few years. In 1898 the Earl Fruit Co., with manager J.A. Anderson was the only fruit shipping and packing shed in Lodi located at the southwest corner of Pine and Main Streets.

In 1902 A.L. Chappell was the local agent for Earl Fruit Co. and Lodi had its first independent shipper and packer, James A. Anderson, located at Main and Oak Streets.

In January of the same year, Elmer A. Humphrey of Winters was at the Lodi train depot greeting friends. He was enroute to Bakersfield to work for the Producers Fruit Company.

In 1904 E.A. "Beau" Humphrey was back in Lodi as manager of the Earl Fruit Company. He became a leader and spokesman for the Lodi Tokay grape industry which had 1600 acres of producing Tokays at this early date.

Besides the Earl and Anderson sheds, the Mason brothers, Doctor Wilton and Louie had a dried fruit



▲ J.A. Anderson Shed. The wagon in the middle was built to haul grain and watermelons while the two others were made for grapes.



▲ Mason Bros. Fruit Co. No shortage of labor to load and unload boxes.



▲ Inside the Mason Bros. shed; Front row on left: Ethel Ritter.





▲ California Fruit Exchange packing on the loading platform outdoors.

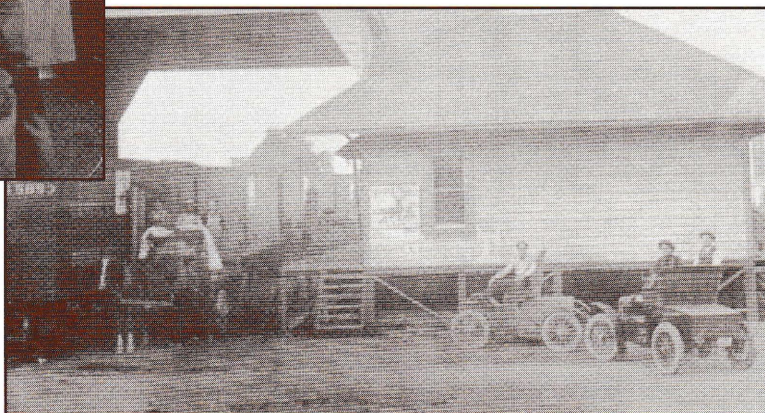


▲ J.J. Schmiedt shed on south Sacramento Street, a family operation using the "Anvil" label. Top row, l-r: John G. Schmiedt, father of J.J.; David Erfle, father-in-law; Dave Kroll; Unknown; John Erfle and owner John J. Schmiedt (J.J.). Bottom row: Barbara Schmiedt, wife of J.J. on left and Fredia Erfle third from right.



▲ 1919; Stewart Fruit Company, using four-basket crates.

Frank H. Buck Packing Shed, northwest corner of Pine and Main Streets. Horses still doing the hard work as horseless carriages make an entrance.



warehouse on north Main Street and Oppenheim, with George Kaufman as manager, who was a shipper of green and dried fruit had a shed on Sacramento Street near Pine Street. By December, George E. Lawrence was building a packing shed on his property at the intersection of Lockeford Street and the railroad tracks.

The influx of North and South Dakotans to the Lodi and Victor area were hardy farmers. They had large families and were not afraid of hard work. They converted the grain and watermelons to grapes and other fruit. W.G. Micke, from Missouri, started his grapevines and peach trees.

The increased production of grapes created the need for building two to three wineries in Lodi and a new co-op in Woodbridge. Besides the packing sheds on the growers' land, two new sheds rose on Main Street. The Pioneer Fruit Co., John Derrig manager, and The California Fruit Exchange with L.T. Mason as manager of both The Exchange and Mason Bros.

In August 1905, Elbert A. Covell sold his Tokay crop for \$160.00 an acre. Zinfandel grapes sold for \$5.00 a ton which was half the price of a year earlier. Mr. James A. Anderson was a pioneer grower and shipper of Lodi fruit. He died in December, 1905 and his daughter Alta and son James G. ran the business for a number of years.

The same year The California Fruit Exchange started cooling green fruit with refrigerated railroad cars for the Eastern market. On September 9th the first car arrived in New York



in bad condition as the man in charge on the train was afraid to lower the temperature enough, he thought the grapes might freeze. The move from cattle cars to ice and fans in insulated refrigerated cars was a great help in moving Lodi fruit to market.

In 1906 more grapes were planted in Lodi and one more shipper and packer moved into the area, the Producers Fruit Company located on Main Street near Lockeford. The following year The Frank H. Buck Company, which was established twenty years earlier, built their Lodi shed just east of the railroad passenger depot on Main Street. The town of Lodi was growing and farmers were happy and prosperous growing grapes and they celebrated by honoring both the Tokay and Zinfandel grape with a carnival in the peak of the harvest season.

Loading and packing sheds were being built in Acampo, Woodbridge, Victor and all the new stations on the Electric Traction Line – Kettleman, Ampere, Norton and Black Lands.

This was also the beginning of the packing shed fires. Built of wood and one large room, they were almost impossible to extinguish after a good fire got started. In November the Mason Brothers shed was destroyed by fire.

Burton A. Towne, Sr. purchased 50 acres of the Covell vineyard after his marriage to Alice Weinstock for \$300.00 per acre. It was Burton and his father Horace Towne who were the first to double crown a Tokay vine

with the support of a redwood stake. They showed the district how to produce quality Tokays, were the first to dress up the crates with red cellophane like covering and tie bunches with red silk ribbon. They were the first to use a label on the box and to advertise. James Prentice gave Towne credit for being the first to discontinue the use of plows for discs about 1919.

In the early years the Tokay grapes and other table grapes were packed upside down in two, four and eight basket crates. In 1910, four basket crates were used. With the aid of a collapsible form, the grapes were packed face down in this form and when filled, a basket was slipped over the form, turned right side up and the form removed. This method gave way to the "Face-Up" grape packing until about 1920 when Everts Mills intro-

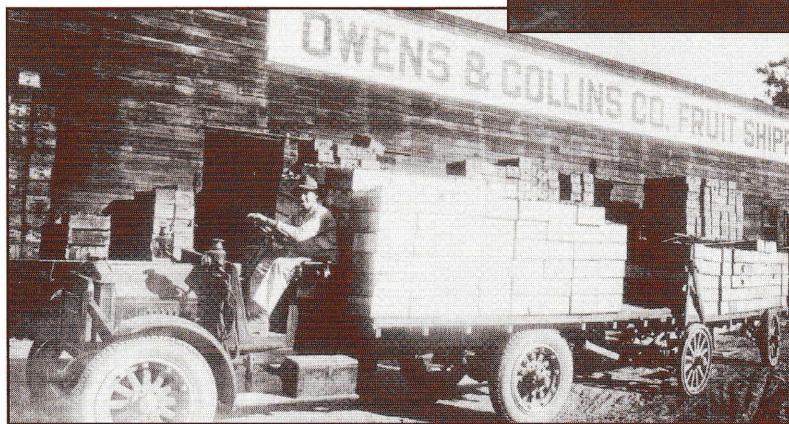
duced the stem-up pack.

In Lodi, as elsewhere, pickers picked the ripe grapes and placed them in large boxes that were then transported to the packing sheds. There, ladies from almost every home packed fruit into shipping crates.

Later, to cut down on cost, most of the Tokay grapes were packed in the field as they were picked. "Beau" Humphrey and the Hughson Brothers invented the display lug which was used for field and house pack.

In 1902 The Frank H. Buck Co. was northeast of town. Four years later they had a new packing shed at the northwest corner of Pine and Main Street. Many pictures of the arch show the Congressman's shed in the background extending across the railroad spur.

▼ Pioneer Fruit Co., No smoking, no talking, no admission. Note ribbons for top of boxes.



▲ Lodi, 1920; New truck with lights and solid tire trailer. Irving Bell, driver.

▲ B.A. Towne – Extra fancy Tokay grapes; Earl Fruit Co., shipper.





▲ Pacific Fruit Exchange, 1917. Gene Beckman, third man, left row.



▲ Unknown grape packer at the E.G. Williams and Sons packing shed near Lodi.

*Bank of Stockton Photo*

Some packing sheds were on the grape and tree fruit ranches. Loading sheds were built where roads crossed railroads – Woodbridge, Acampo, Victor and all the Traction Line stations – Black Lands, Norton (Live Oak), Ampere and Kettleman. Trains started on the Western Pacific Railroad in 1910 and more loading platforms like Bracks Switch were added. The Traction Line opened to Sacramento with packing sheds at Campton (Youngstown) and platforms at Woodbridge and Peltier Roads.

In 1911 The Pacific Fruit Exchange of Sacramento built and operated four sheds in the Lodi area plus a large packing shed on Seaton (Main) south of Lodi Avenue. Stewart Fruit Company built on three lots directly south of the Pacific shed and pre-cooling plant. Scobel and Day had a new shed for grapes and on August 24th the grape season started with a shipment of Black Prince.

The sandy loam soil was so rich in nutrients that it was thought that phylloxera was not a

serious disease in Lodi grapes (later found to be wrong).

Due to early rains which caused mildew and rot, 1912 and 1914 were bad years for grape growers. Even so, there were heavy planting of grape vines in the Lodi area. 1913 was a dry winter and Jacob Nies said that year was the start of the spring irrigation and the following year grape farmers on the more shallow soils started summer irrigation.

The water table had dropped to such a low level in the Black Lands that many acres of grapes were replaced with other crops.

Before the start of the season, the women grape packers in the Lodi sheds were asking for the same wage that the men received in both the picking in the fields and the loading of the train cars. There was no immediate answer from the shippers and growers.

New shippers were J.V. Bare, F.F. Lambourne, Biggs, W.T. Owens and Denny Company and the T.H. Peppers Company.

1915 was a year that the Lodi growers of Tokays made money. A



year later on the morning of May 24th, frost killed the green growth of the vines, estimated to be a \$5,000.00 disaster. 1917 followed with more cold weather in the early spring.

May 1, 1918 J.V. Bare purchased the 320 acre Boyce Ranch and Lodi's newest winery, Roma, announced it was going to crush 10,000 tons of grapes and pay \$22.00 a ton or higher.

Two years ahead of our nation, California went (bone dry) prohibition beginning July 1, 1918. By the end of August, San Joaquin County closed all saloons. This sounded like disaster for Lodi grapes but instead grape syrup replaced the state wine industry. The price of Zinfandel grapes rose to \$55.00 a ton as most of the states were still "wet."

The ten year contracts by the California Wine Association for \$10.00 a ton were cancelled when prohibition started as you could not legally make wine or any alcohol.

In 1919 the Lodi growers and shippers started a grape league with



▲ W.G. Micke field crew.

*San Joaquin County Historical Society Photo*

George Ashley as the leader. This was the start of the many attempts to control the shipping of Tokay grapes. This was another good year for grapes even though the United States government amended the constitution to prohibit the making and use of alcohol. It was a year later in January, 1920 when prohibition went into effect.

The 18th Amendment which prohibited the manufacture, sale or transaction of intoxicating liquors did not mention the drinking of same. It was approved by voters in 1919 and became effective a year later.

Lodi grapes were still sold at a good price on the fresh market. Farmers continued to plant grapes,



▲ Peter Joens ranch east of Lodi. Mary (Marrs) Joens, three unknown, two Ulmer girls, Viola (Joens) Beckman and Mrs. Joens.





▲ Helen (Gray) Bush and Marion (Gray) Williams

mostly Tokay table grapes. The shippers began to advertise Tokays nationwide on a small scale.

The growers continued to make money with illicit wine making plus the government allowed each family to make 200 gallons of wine.

#### THE LODI HISTORIAN

is a quarterly publication of the Lodi Historical Society  
P.O. Box 264, Lodi, CA 95241-0264

\*Ralph Lea ..... Editor  
\*Lucy Reller ..... Assistant Editor

#### LODI HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1997 Board of Directors

\*Janice Roth ..... President  
\*Bing Taylor ..... 1st Vice President  
\*Vesta Mason ..... 2nd Vice President  
\*Nancy Schmer ..... Recording Secretary  
\*Evelyn Hassbaum ..... Corresponding Secretary  
\*Hugh Metcalf ..... Treasurer

Lynn Benbrook ..... \*Ralph Lea  
\*Susanne Benbrook ..... Leonard Messer  
Esther Bender ..... \*Gladys Mettler  
Bill Brown ..... \*Walter Scott

\*Violet Stenson

#### HISTORY COMMITTEE

Ralph Lea, Chairman  
Ellen Edwards, Lucy Reller, Jean Kettleman,  
Helen Crittenden, Maxine Kelley

\*History Committee Member  
All rights to republication are reserved  
Permission to quote or use material herein should be obtained in writing

In 1921 Alicante grapes set a record price of \$182.50 a ton. (This was a popular wine grape that later lost favor when its bright red color was found to fade.) A 1,050-crate railroad car of Tokay grapes sold for \$3.80 per crate. Even the Tokay strippings, those grapes left on the vine after picking, sold out for \$85.00 a ton when shipped as they were also made into wine. Lodi had a large increase of wine grapes planted.

In 1921 there were Japanese, Chinese, Hindu and Whites picking grapes. The Caucasians earned 35¢ an hour and the rest were paid 30¢. Some were for striking for 40¢ but they settled for 35¢. The grape packers received 35¢ an hour or .06¢ per crate. The box nailer earned .01¢ each crate and labeling paid 20¢ for a hundred.

It was a good year for the growers but shippers like Setchell Fruit and San Joaquin Valley Packers went bankrupt. It was also bad for the owners of the packing sheds on Main Street from Pine to Walnut. A fire started in a pile of car strips on the west side of the Earl Fruit shed, spread to the Pepper Fruit Company and the Anderson Fruit Company. The three lost sheds and shook for boxes. This was

July 2, 1921, less than two months before the grape season was to start. They all rebuilt but the city made them use fireproof material. Perhaps you wondered why those sheds had clay and tile instead of the wooden frame elsewhere.

The 1922 railroad shortage of both refrigeration and box cars held the shipping of grapes in Lodi to a limit. The growers asked President Harding for help but continued to ship Zinfandels to Oregon and nearby states in cattle cars.

Starting in 1923 the demand for Lodi grapes, including Tokays, became increasingly smaller until most of the grapes stayed on the vine to rot. A few farmers made illegal brandy in Lodi from the unpicked grapes but most had to be cut off when they were pruned.

In order to provide some insurance for rain on Zinfandels and other grapes, one hundred Lodi growers purchased the Mokelumne Winery from Lee Jones for \$100,000.00.

The law allowed the winery to manufacture sweet grape juice and sell the same, providing that it reached the buyers unfermented.

This concludes the first part of the Lodi grape story.

#### REFERENCES

Lewis Publishing Company  
1890 History of San Joaquin County

Thompson and West  
1879 History of San Joaquin County

Tinkham  
1923 History of San Joaquin County

1943  
The Story of the Flame Tokay  
by James M. Prentice

Lodi Sentinel  
1881 - 1930

Stockton Record  
1921 - 1925